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3. *Intercepted Letters of Virginian Tories, 1775*

THESE two letters from Tories at Portsmouth, Virginia, were found among the manuscripts in the Virginia State Library, "Executive Communications", by Mr. Waldo G. Leland. The first has lost its original wrapper and bears neither signature nor name of addressee, but is identified as having been written by John Johnson by an indorsement on the part of H. W. R. Curle, who was perhaps the interceptor. The second was apparently written by a canny Scottish merchant or factor, chiefly interested in the "main chance", but for that very reason not indifferent to the political events going on around him. The sequel of his strivings for profitable commerce, resulting in prosecution for violation of the non-importation agreement in January, 1776, after Norfolk had passed into the hands of the Americans, may be read in the report of a committee of the Virginia Convention, Force's *Archives*, fourth series, IV. 109, 126, 128. In date both of these letters fall in the interval between Lord Dunmore's minor success at Kemp's Landing and his more important defeat at the Great Bridge.

PORTSMOUTH Novemr. 16th 1775
being Thursday

Dear Sir

As Politicks are now uppermost in all men's minds I sit down to give you a sketch of affairs in this Colony, and of the Situation of Foreigners, particularly Britons residing here. Ever since the Convention broke up in August the greatest diligence has been used in raising Troops, and a considerable Number have been imbodyed at Williamsburg, some say Twelve or Fifteen Hundred, others more. They consist of Regulars and Minute Men. The footing on which the latter are rais'd, and are to act, I cannot explain to Your satisfaction, without having the Ordinance of Convention,¹ wch. indeed I have never seen. Part of this Body are destined for Norfolk, and there is certain intelligence, that, notwithstanding the vigilance of the Tenders employ'd to guard the Ferries on James River, about Seven Hundred Men are got across to Grays Creek, and probably are now on their march down. People at Norfolk and this place, are dreadfully alarm'd with the report that has long prevailed of their intentions of burning the Towne: certain it is many terrible Threats have been made, either because they are made to believe that a majority of the Inhabitants are Scotch, and of course Friends to Government, or from an apprehension that Norfolk will be made a Garrison, and consequently a Station for Troops and ships of War. To quiet People's minds the Committee of Safety have publish'd a Declaration of which I send you a copy; tho' I am far from thinking their integrity is call'd in question, yet this will not remove People's appre-

¹ Hening, IX. 9-35.

hensions; if the Colony Troops get possession of Norfolk, the Rifle Men will endeavour to annoy the Ships by taking their stand behind Houses, and firing at the officers or men who appear on the Decks, which may bring on the destruction of the Place, tho' not at this time intended by either Party. Almost all the Goods are pack't up, and moved or moving out of Town, with Household Furniture and everything that can possibly be spared, many are gone out to the Country with their Families, in short I believe on the approach of the Virga. Forces every one will go who has any Friends to receive them; Scotch Men who are single will probably go on board some of the Ships in the Government service. Notice was brought Lord Dunmore on Sunday Evening¹ that a Body of Men was assembled at the Great Bridge about 10 miles distant, up the Southern Branch; on Monday night he went against them with about 200 Soldiers and Marines, and a few volunteers from Norfolk, about day break on Tuesday He got to the Bridge, but found no Body there; from thence he proceeded to Kemp's² where 'tis said about 300 men were in Arms, these He dispers'd after a few discharges from the Troops. Tho' this happen'd so near us we have not yet got any certain account of it some say three of the Provincials are kill'd and one drown'd, others that only one is kill'd. Several are taken Prisoners, among them Colo. Joseph Hutchings of Norfolk.³ Since the dispersion of this Body Lord Dunmore has been employ'd as we're told in receiving submissions from such as are willing to return to their Duty and allegiance, and in making search for these who have been active in raising and carrying on this opposition to Government—For some time past He has declared that as soon as he certainly knew of the Colony Troops having cross'd James River in order to march down here, that he would issue his proclamation declaring them Enemies to the Government, of which herewith send you a copy.⁴ I am extremely sorry that he has promis'd freedom to their Slaves, as without serving his cause it may subject many of these poor Wretches to the Loss of Life, and most severe punishments. You may judge the Situation of Your Country Men at this Crisis, these settled here may be compell'd to take up arms, which is contrary to their inclination, their Interest, and future Views, those in the Country must rise to suppress any Insurrection amongst the Slaves, which is expressly mention'd in a Memorial or Petition presented to the Convention at Richmond last August. It would not surprise me to hear of some of them being made Prisoners, as Lord Dunmore has taken several who

¹ November 12.

² Kemp's Landing, now Kempsville, ten miles southeast of Norfolk. On the skirmish here, see Mrs. Maxwell's recollections in *Lower Norfolk County Virginia Antiquary*, III. 132-134.

³ Col. Joseph Hutchings was one of the chief men of Norfolk. See letter of Edmund Pendleton to Richard Henry Lee in Force's *Archives*, fourth series, IV. 202.

⁴ For Dunmore's proclamation from on board the *William*, November 7, 1775, see Niles, *Principles and Acts*, ed. 1822, p. 373, or Force's *Archives*, fourth series, VII. 1385.

were not in Arms, it will signify perhaps little that their conduct was different from that of our Countrymen, and that they openly busied themselves in exciting others to an opposition to Government, while we have avoided such measures in favour of it, Such Circumstances will I am afraid be overlook't. I heartily wish my apprehensions may be ill grounded. The Governor and the Troops are not yet return'd from Princess Anne, the weak resistance he met there will probably give him a mean opinion of the Forces from the upper parts of the Country who are certainly very different men, many of them possessed of considerable property, who serve to promote the cause, and not merely to earn a subsistence. Should he resolve to meet them, I among others shall be call'd to the Field. I am so circumstanced that all my private Debts are in reality Debts of honour, if I should fall God knows how they will be adjusted! to Your management I must commit this Task, I do not think it worth while to make a Will or would appoint you Executor.

I unluckily left behind me at Page's some Papers without which I cannot settle my private affairs. I intended before this time [*sic*], but of late People have been obliged to apply to the Committees for permission to pass,¹ and here we have no Committee to whom to make application. Yet I cannot say this alone has prevented me from going up, tho' join'd to other disagreeable Circumstances it has had Weight. Some time ago Anthony Warwick, Mich. Wallace and I went down to Hampton and were detained by the Committee from Monday Evening till Friday morning when we made our escape while some of the Tenders were firing on the Town, cross'd Hampton Creek, and Mill Creek, walk'd round by the old Fort, and were taken on board the Tenders and brought to Portsmouth. We could not obtain a hearing from the Committee, nor was any Parole required of us, the last night of our stay we were confined to a room, and three Sentinels placed over us. We were taken into Custody in consequence of an Advertisement publish'd by the Committee of Safety requiring them to examine all suspected Persons, they rank'd us in that number, and suspected us of coming as Spies. I mention this affair to show you the Spirit of the times. During our confinement at Hampton a Number of men were station'd there for the defence of the place, on the day we came off, the Tenders were repuls'd owing chiefly to their want of amunition; and a Pilot Boat was taken, occasioned by the rashness of a Lieutenant who ran her close into John Jones's [*illegible*], from whence a constant fire was kept up [*rest of line torn off*] posted themselves in it. One man was kill'd another mortally wounded and seven taken Prisoners, who are all since released, excepting one detained for some misbehaviour. Many Falsities have been circulated concerning this ill judged attack.²

By a Vessel which arrived from New York about a fortnight ago the Governor and several of the Officers had intelligence of Montgomery,

¹ Orders of the Committee of Safety in Force, *Archives*, fourth series, III. 1190.

² See the account of it in Henry's *Patrick Henry*, I. 323, 324.

who during the Sickness of Schuyler, commanded the Army sent against St. John's, being totally defeated, having lost about a Thousand Men and several officers of rank, but this will never be generally known in this Country, and private Letters from New York say every human Artifice has been made use of to prevent its being made known. If true as I make little doubt and sincerely wish it, we will first see the account from England. I have troubled you with this long incorrect scrawl (which I have not time to copy) to give you some idea of our Situation, treated and dispised as the most worthless of mankind, for adhering to the Government, under which we were born, have lived, and till of late been happy. It is certainly a mistaken lenity to leave the Friends of the present Establishment at the mercy of those doing their utmost to overturn it, and [*line torn off*] hoped that next summer Great Britain will exert her utmost vigour to crush this ungrateful Rebellion, and send out an Army sufficient to disperse Washington's and a Fleet to convince the City of Philadelphia that it is not inaccessible. It at present rests secure that some floating Batteries they have built are capable of defending them, and it is said they are building a Sixty Gun Ship, and fitting out Privatiers. Should a British Fleet get up to Philadelphia I imagine there would be no occasion to proceed to extremeties, every thing would be given up to save it from destruction. I hope the Ministry will no longer be intimidated by the Clamours of the wretched Remnant of a disappointed Faction, from prosecuting the War with vigour and depriving America of supplies of Goods arms and amunition, of all which they have this summer smuggled considerable quantities, and it has not been in the power of the few Vessels station'd here to stop them. Unless a Packet is established from Britain directly to Virg^a, You must be very cautious what you write, the Congress has now erected a Post offic and in all probability Letters from Britain will all be opened and any thing [*two lines torn off*] may always be mentioned. The 17th. This day Lord Dunmore and the Troops returned, there were five of the Princess Anne men kill'd at Kemps, two drown'd and fourteen Prisoners or some say fifteen. So many Falsities are daily circulated, that we can hardly credit anything that passes through a number of hands. That we may again see Peace and good Government firmly established, and be enabled to do Justice to all Mankind, is my most fervent wish.

I forgot to tell you that about 300 P. Anne Men have come in and sworn allegiance Yesterday and to day the Oaths have been administered to the people of Norfolk, our turn I imagine will be next

I am with great sincerity

Dear Sir

Your most obed. Servt.

[Indorsement]

John Johnson was the person confined in Hampton as above mentioned with Warwick and Wallace.

H. W. R. CURLE.

PORTSMOUTH NOV^r 20th, 1775.

Dear Jack:

I have yet at this date an Opportunity of writing you by the Christie Capt James Avery Which I am sorie for, I wish she had Saild 10 days Ago As I expected, for I Apprehend Within this few days A great Many people has had there Eyes Opened And Will Write now by this Sloop for Goods.

the Governor went this day Week with a party of the Troops and some Volentiers from Norfolk to the Great Bridge landed them and marched to Kemps, where a Number of Shirt Men¹ from Princes Ann and some of Norfolk Co^r. had collected to the Number of 3 or 400 Men who drew themselves up, and determined to Wait the arrival of the Troops and give the Governor Battle. As soon as the Troops Appeared the Shirt Men began to fire as far as they could see them, and kept on fireing till the Troops got pretty near them but did no damage. the Troops Made One fire which made the Shirt Men all take to the Woods they killed Some Say 4 or 5 others 8 or 9 and took a Number of Prisoners amongst them Col^o Hutchings and Anth^o Lawson² who is now Confined on Board the Eilback. the Governor Imediately Issued his Proclamation (Copy of which I Inclosd Mr Sym) declaring all Rebels that did not Immediately repair to the Kings Standard, their Negroes and Servants free that was able and willing to bear arms. *Since that the whole countys of Norfolk and Princes Ann to a man has come in to the Standard which is now erected in Norfolk and taken the Oaths of Allegiance to his Majesty—a few Individuals excepted which the Governor would not allow in order to make some examples of some of the Leading Men.*

before Saturday Night I think Government will have such a party here as the Shirt Men dare not face, there was a great many volinteers went with the Governor and his party to Kemps, the greatest part of which has had the Offer of Commissions, amongst the rest George Blair is appointed and has accepted a Captains Commission in one of the Companys which is to be rais'd Imediately. I hope we shall be allowed to remain in peace and quietness Now. John Brown who was one of the volinteers upon the Strength of being protected has begun to Load his Sch^o with Staves for Jamaica, they bear a high price amongst all the West Indie Islands. I Should Send Pickets Sloop out Imediately, but I keep him to hold my goods in case of accident that I May have my property amply [*illegible*]. as soon as the Regt is completed which is now raising, I shall land the Whole of my goods and think them very Safe in my Stores again.

¹ Virginian minute-men, often dressed in hunting-shirts.

² Col. Anthony Lawson, J. P., was one of the richest and most prominent men of Princess Anne County. Proposals for his exchange and that of Col. Hutchings were made in vain by the Virginia Committee of Safety, May 3, 1776, *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, VIII. 166; Lawson was released on parole in the ensuing November by Governor Tonyn of East Florida, after confinement at St. Augustine. The order for release is printed in Hanson's *Old Kent of Maryland*, p. 174.

let me beg of you to loose not a Moment, but be as Expeditious as possible and bring out as Many Goods in the Brig as She will hold. Now is the time to Strick a bold Strock depend upon it you will Never have such another to Make Money by dry Goods in this Country.

Oznabrigs and Canvas a large q^{ty} [quantity of] Course Linens, Checks, Sheetings, handfs, Stockings, and every necessary article a large and full assortment of goods, Nails etc. bring as many as you can get credit for.

If Gibsons Sloop is at Glasgow, I would wish him Loaded also. If you wish bring 20 M^l Steg¹ I am certain they could be sold of Instantly and to Advantage, have them insur'd that in case of accident the creditors May be Safe.

As soon as Matters is a little Settled here, I expect to be a Considerable remitter. I have 1300 £ Steg from the Birth [?] will be due in a few Months and the like sum from Calderhead, besides 1000 £ owing me in Norfolk and which is owing me in the country. If we could have a Meeting and any Sort of payments I expect to Remit a large Sum. I am afraid McRenals lost he has never been heard of Since he Saild from the W Ind the 30th Augt for Norfolk. the Agatha² is Never yet Arrived. I am afraid he will be a long time detained in Lebay [?].

Aga³ is perfectly Recoverd Since you left us I thank God And we are all in good health. Remember us all to My Mama and Sisters and all Friends I am Dear Jack

Your Affect Brother

ROBERT SHEDDEN

[Addressed:] To

Mr John Shedden Jnr
Glasgow

[Endorsed:] Robt Shedden

(intelligence and inimical)

No 5

Nov 20th 1775

4. Letter of John Marshall to James Wilkinson, 1787

FOR the following letter we are indebted to Colonel Reuben T. Durrett, LL.D., of Louisville, Kentucky. Colonel Durrett writes: "This letter was written to General James Wilkinson, at that time a resident of Kentucky, although his name does not appear in the address. His name and address were on the envelope, which has since been destroyed." The letter, as Colonel Durrett intimates,

¹ Twenty thousand pounds sterling.

² The sloop *Agatha*, Captain Wilson, was on her way from the West Indies. Upon her arrival she was seized for violation of the non-importation agreement. Force's *Archives*, fourth series, IV. 109, 126, 128.

³ Agatha, wife of Robert Shedden. Their marriage bond, dated August 30, 1768, is calendared in the *Lower Norfolk County Virginia Antiquary*, IV. 57.